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## Podcast Script

Carolyn:

What comes to mind when you think about fangs, blood, broomsticks, and magic? For me, personally, I automatically think of Halloween, but that's not what we're talking about today. We're talking about vampires and witches. Now let me ask you something, what kind of image comes to mind when you think of vampires and witches? Does your mind go to the classic Dracula for a vampire? Or maybe Edward Cullen? How about for witches? Are you thinking of those ugly green women that fly around on broomsticks? Or are you thinking more of Sabrina the teenage witch or *The Vampire Diaries'* Bonnie Bennett? The thing is none of these answers are wrong; they're all different interpretations of vampires and witches. The real question is why has the representation changed, and that's exactly what we'll be discussing today. We'll be diving in to a history lesson on the evolution of the representation of vampires and witches through time and how these two seemingly different creatures are actually more alike than we once believed. I'm Carolyn.

Erika:  
I'm Erika.

Q:  
I'm Q.

Isabella:

And I'm Isabella. Let's talk about vampires and witches.

Vampires have been around for centuries. Vampires first came to be as folklore. They were used as scapegoats to explain the unexplainable at the time. Due to lack of knowledge on contagious diseases, the people living at that time needed some type of explanation. Things such as seizures were even seen as demonic, and certain symptoms of illnesses were sometimes interpreted as signs of vampirism. People didn't understand at the time that these were simply just illnesses.

They excused these diseases as demonic and blamed vampire for the unexplained deaths.<sup>1</sup>

Q:

Similar to vampires, witches have very interesting background stories from old green women luring young women into the woods to being possessed by the devil, but one that stands out the most is that witches weren't picked randomly, but they were marked by the Devil which is called the "Mark of a witch". The name witch was birth from an old English noun "*Wicca*" which is

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<sup>1</sup>Lecerle, Jean-Jacques. "The kitten's nose: Dracula and witchcraft." *Essays and Studies*, 2001, p. 71+. *Literature Resource Center*, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A90534156/LitRC?u=txshracd2588&sid=LitRC&xid=9fa2cf80>. Accessed 20 Feb. 2018.

also the known religion for people who still believe in witches and practice witchcraft today, which has about over 134,000 people practicing “*Wicca*” today in America. The appearance of witches come in different looks from the long nose elderly women covered in warts to mysterious beautiful women.<sup>2</sup> In this podcast, we will dive deeper in to both mythical creatures and discover their similarities and many unknown facts about the two.

Erika:

Bouncing off of what Isabella was saying about how vampirism was blamed for the unexplainable diseases, illnesses, and deaths that occurred back then, if you suddenly became terminally ill, it was most likely the work of a vampire feeding off you and draining you of life. People also thought you could be a vampire if you had a disease, what we now call porphyria. This disease caused people to suffer itching, blisters and rashes whenever they were exposed to sunlight, and in some cases, have their gums recede from their teeth, making the teeth appear larger. Sound familiar?<sup>3</sup>

Isabella:

That actually sounds gross. It’s funny cause at that time science wasn’t as updated as it is now so for many of the diseases that came about they couldn’t conduct any research on them, so they would create these theories and stories about them just so that there’s an explanation.

Carolyn:

Yeah, after doing some research I discovered that in 1889 Dr. B.J. Stokvis found the “*vampire disease*”. He studied some of the vampire cases and found that they all had similar symptoms, and discovered the disease called Porphyria.

Erika:

There’s also a psychological disorder called Renfield syndrome which is named after the character in *Dracula*, R.M. Renfield. The disorder is the obsession of drinking blood. Which is kind of disturbing but also interesting.<sup>4</sup>

Q:

Thank God for science and medicine! Imagine living in a time of confusion thinking creatures are running around your town from the living dead just to suck your blood. Witches suffer a

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<sup>2</sup> Schimmelpfennig, Annette. "Chaos Reigns - Women as Witches in Contemporary Film and the Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm." *Gender Forum*, no. 44, 2013, pp. 1, *GenderWatch*, <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/docview/1444595138?accountid=7107>.

<sup>3</sup> Winkler, Mary G., and Karl E. Anderson. "Vampires, Porphyria, and the Media: Medicalization of a Myth." *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, vol. 33, no. 4, 1990, pp. 598–611.

<sup>4</sup> Olry, Régis and Duane E Haines. "Renfield's Syndrome: A Psychiatric Illness Drawn from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*." *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, vol. 20, no. 4, Oct. 2011, pp. 368-371. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1080/0964704X.2011.595655.

terrible fate as well due to the high religious influence and lack of science. Many women and few men were killed due to these stories and theories.

Isabella:

Thousands of women were murdered in sadistic ways from drowning, to burning at the stake, being stoned to death, and many other sickening ways from as early as the 15th century to as late as the 18th century.

Carolyn:

Sadly, that was the way of life back then. It's crazy to think that people genuinely believed some women would use magic to curse a village with a plague, killing countless numbers of people as a way of doing the Devil's bidding. It's really sad when you realize that to "solve" the issue of unexplainable death people turned to murdering others that were oftentimes innocent.

Q:

Yeah I know, it makes it more crazy when you find out the diseases and illness linked to the witches like epilepsy, ergot poisoning, schizophrenia, dissociative identity disorder, and the most associated one is Encephalitis lethargica, which is a disease that attacks the brain, leaving some victims in a statue-like condition, speechless and motionless. Looking at this small list most seem to be connected to some sort of mental illness.

Carolyn:

It's sad that people with these illnesses were so mistreated and misunderstood, however, it does make sense considering that common symptoms of these psychological disorders included delusions and hallucinations. The fact that mental illnesses weren't as common at this time made it much easier to just chalk all these unusual behaviors up to just being demonic possession or anything evil considering religion was such a heavy influence back then.

Erika:

Yeah, and nowadays thinking about stuff like that being done in the western part of the world where we are is pretty much unheard of and not common at all, thankfully!

Carolyn:

It's pretty funny when you think about it actually. Because nowadays if someone were to accuse another person of being possessed or a vampire or a witch, they'd just end up being called crazy themselves!

Erika:

You make a good point. With the advancements in science and medicine, you really have to keep in mind that times started to change as well. Leisure activities and different forms of

entertainment began to grow popular and with this, the strict belief of religion started to slowly diminish.

Isabella:

And with times changing and priorities changing, the utilization of vampires and witches and the purposes they served started to change as well.

Carolyn:

And it wasn't an instant 180 shift either. For example, think of *Hocus Pocus* the Halloween movie. The witches are still portrayed as evil and horrible women who are trying to steal children's youth, but they are presented in a more friendly manner. These witches are represented less as monsters and given more human qualities like a more natural colored skin tone. They also sing and joke around with each other throughout the movie which is something that's completely new to the witch image. Though these new traits are introduced, most of the typical traits of witches were generally kept consistent in this movie. It wasn't really until later that major changes were really made.<sup>5</sup>

Q:

Not only did the witch image change, the vampire image changed as well. Take a look at *Twilight*. The vampires in this film are shown as supernaturally beautiful rather than hideous. Edward, in particular, also shows emotions which are typically more associated with humans rather than vampires.<sup>6</sup>

Erika:

It's actually pretty interesting, the progression that we see in the two images. Of course we all know that vampires started out as being evil, mysterious, and unnaturally pale with long skinny, pointy fingers and daggers for teeth. For instance Dracula or Nosferatu. But now, we see a lot of those images being more romanticized and portrayed as beautiful and strong, such as Edward Cullen or the Salvatore brothers from *The Vampire Diaries*.

Carolyn:

I really want to talk about this new "beautiful monster" concept for a minute. Why do you think the image of vampires and witches has changed? There are no right or wrong answers here, but if you asked me, I'd personally go back and tie it to the idea that the demands of the times have changed. Think about it. With the knowledge that we have now about different diseases, we

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<sup>5</sup> *Hocus Pocus*. Directed by Kenny Ortega, Buena Vista Pictures, 1993.

<sup>6</sup> Corliss, Richard. "Opposites Attract." *Time*, vol. 172, no. 22, 12/1/2008, pp. 77-78. EBSCOhost, [ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=35392234&site=ehost-live](http://ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=35392234&site=ehost-live).

don't really have a demand or need for some alternative explanation. Without a specific need for vampires and witches anymore, their old image becomes unnecessary. I feel like the, no pun intended, revamping of the vampire and witch image is due to new demands of this era. We currently find ourselves in an era where imperfection is seen as the new perfection, and with that, the demand for characters who are imperfect has grown. Do you see where I'm going with this? Vampires and witches today are given supernatural qualities yet at the same time human like flaws, and I think this is all because people today want a character that they can relate to since "nobody is perfect". That's just my personal opinion. What does everyone else think?

Erika:

Yeah, I definitely agree with the idea that the popular characters out there are the relatable ones. Especially if it's the modern day image of vampires or witches, those beings that are strong, clever, and have powers! I feel like everyone would want to see the relatable side to characters with these special features because it somehow validates that sense of feeling that we could be similar to such amazing characters with these real world problems.

Q:

Same, I agree witches and vampires hold more human like features which personal make them more appealing. For instance, in the movie *The Witch*<sup>7</sup> the witches really just looked like a typical human, but their facial expression, personality, and just their body language gave them the impression that they were evil. This makes them even more horrifying because you typically wouldn't suspect your normal looking person to do such evil acts opposed to the traditional looks that gave them the more monster and unrealistic features. In today's society when we go to the movies and watch a horror movie we want to be scared to the realism of the movie, because we can easily relate to it more which intensify the experience.

Isabella:

I completely agree! It's like the fact that they are more relatable to us humans make it even more appealing and interesting to us, but at the same time it's almost as if that fact that we can relate to them means that people could also possibly be monsters as well.

Carolyn:

I really love hearing what everyone had to say, but we have to keep this conversation rolling. We know that the image and qualities of vampires and witches have started to become more relatable to human qualities, so with that being said, let's get in to this new "good" image they have started to represent.

Isabella:

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<sup>7</sup> *The Witch*. Directed by Robert Eggers, A24, 2016.

*The Vampire Diaries* is such a great example of this because it not only shows vampires in a different representation, it shows witches as well. Bonnie Bennett, which is one of my personal favorites, is such a strong character in this series, and it's honestly so hard not to love her. She's a witch, of course, but the twist is that she's a good witch.

Q:

Good witches are a newer type of witch that started to show up around this time, which personally I don't like because they weren't meant to be "good". They were meant to be the antagonist and bring fear and potentially death.

Isabella:

The interesting thing is that though vampires and witches are now currently being portrayed in more of a "good" light, they still are shown struggling between being either good or bad.

Erika:

For example, the Salvatore brothers from *The Vampire Diaries*. Stefan is seen more as the logical and good vampire, and Damon is the reckless, risk taking brother. However, Damon does have his soft side when it comes to family and loved ones, and we're able to see his conflict when he wants to do the bad thing, but ends up going out of his way to help out and save whoever it be!<sup>8</sup>

Carolyn:

And the thing that makes the characters so captivating is that, even though there's this image of being either on the good or the bad side, all the characters seem to fall somewhere in between that. Both the witches and the vampires in the series seem to encompass a mix of both good and bad and that struggle of fighting to be more good or more bad is what gets the audience so hooked!

Isabella:

This all goes back to the whole idea of making these supernatural characters relatable. In a sense, it's like how we as people struggle with making tough decisions and choices because our actions technically define us as either "good" or "bad".

Q:

But like these fictional characters, don't we mostly just find ourselves somewhere in between the good and the bad?

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<sup>8</sup> Plec, Julie and Kevin Williamson, creators. *The Vampire Diaries*. Outerbanks Entertainment and Warner Bros. Television, 2009.

Carolyn:

You're absolutely right! That's actually one of the biggest similarities that vampires and witches share today, the fact that they are both portrayed in the sense that they are struggling to essentially find their identity as good or bad. I think we should talk about that struggle a bit more to really help the audience get a feel for the struggles these characters face that make them so relatable and interesting to us.

Erika:

I feel like the two main conflicts the modern day vampire characters seem to have is their love life and trying to keep their identity and truth about being a vampire a secret from everybody.

Carolyn:

And I agree with you on that. I think the same conflicts apply to modern day witches as well. That and the fight to be either good or bad seem to be a reoccurring thing for both vampires and witches today. We can look at Bonnie Bennett from *The Vampire Diaries* for an example. One of her biggest conflicts as a character occurred after she first learned that she came from a witch bloodline making her a witch as well. As she learned more about magic from her grandmother, who she lovingly called Grams, she began to really feel empowered with herself. After Grams untimely death, sorry for the spoiler, she had a hard time feeling strong and really connecting with magic the way she did when Grams was teaching her. In *The Vampire Diaries*, magic is an ability that is considered to come from nature, and after Grams died Bonnie struggled to really learn all the things that Grams was suppose to finish teaching her. Eventually, she picked it up, but the problem was she was not a very strong witch using that kind of "traditional" magic. Coping with Grams' death was really hard for her and she believed she had to get better to make Grams proud in a sense. She later starts learning a form of magic called expression which is a form of black magic. At the time, she had no idea that it was unnatural and evil magic, but it made her very strong. This is where her struggle began. She had to choose between being powerful through evil means or choose to struggle more to become powerful by traditional means.<sup>9</sup>

Isabella:

I think her struggle here is something that I think people can really relate to. As people, things happen sometimes that make us want to seek out "easy" ways of coping with these things. Sometimes the easy way isn't necessarily the right way of doing things, so even though people don't have these magical abilities, Bonnie's struggle is still in a way relatable.

Erika:

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<sup>9</sup> Plec, Julie and Kevin Williamson, creators. *The Vampire Diaries*. Outerbanks Entertainment and Warner Bros. Television, 2009.

Damon's struggle is also a really interesting one from this series as well. Unlike Bonnie, he is a vampire and not a witch; however, he also has a good versus bad kind of conflict. Damon is supposed to be the "bad" brother between the Salvatore brothers. He's supposed to be the reckless one and the impulsive one as I mentioned before. However, we start to see him in a much different light when it comes to him being in love. Elena Gilbert, his love interest in this series, is the epitome of good, so being "the bad brother" definitely makes their relationship difficult. Throughout the series, we get to see Damon essentially grow as a person. He becomes more "good" with Elena's influence. The issue is that Damon is still the same person he was even when he's appeared to have turned more good. He's still reckless and impulsive. He tries to be good because he knows that's what Elena would want from him, but he struggles to give up who he's been so use to being.<sup>10</sup>

Q:

And like with Bonnie's struggle, Damon's is also a struggle that we as people can relate to. The struggle of what's expected of us versus who we really are. The struggle of what feels right to us and what feels wrong. The struggle of wanting to be everything the person you love wants, but also wanting to not have to change yourself. It's a struggle that makes his character so easy to sympathize with.

Isabella:

What great stories and conflicts there are now in entertainment! The struggles we see now are practically nothing like the struggles let's say Dracula had. I feel like the biggest struggle he had was trying to find people to feed on in the night and trying to spread everywhere without getting caught or killed!<sup>11</sup>

Carolyn:

Yeah, I agree with that. These creatures now are seen more in an entertaining aspect. Of course sometimes there is that scare factor to them, but not as much as back then because at that time they actually believed in that stuff to be true, whereas now, most of us only know it to be scary stories or folklore.

Q:

Well, it all really goes back to needing some kind of explanation for the "evil" that plagued whole villages at that time. I'm sure people genuinely believed in vampires and witches at some point in time as well.

Erika:

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<sup>10</sup> Plec, Julie and Kevin Williamson, creators. *The Vampire Diaries*. Outerbanks Entertainment and Warner Bros. Television, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Stoker, Bram. *Dracula*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2004.

I just find it interesting how the sympathy has really grown for these “monsters” over the years. Before, vampires and witches were seen solely as evil and bad, but now they’ve shifted to being misunderstood and sometimes even felt sorry for.

Carolyn:

You’re completely right with about that, and, again, I think this all goes back to that whole idea that vampires and witches are more appealing when the audience can relate to them in the sense that people are often times also misunderstood.

Isabella:

The funny thing is that I’m pretty sure no one hundreds of years ago would’ve wanted to relate to or feel any sympathy for any type of monster, especially vampires and witches, when they were the ones who “caused” these countless numbers of deaths, yet here we are today with people feeling so attached and connected to these same monsters.

Q:

Another thing to point out is that I’m pretty certain no one ever really thought witches and vampires could be so similar either.

Erika:

You make a good point, Q! At first glance, someone might think that witches and vampires are completely different, but when you really dig a little deeper, you find strong connections between the two.

Carolyn:

And Erika makes a really good point with that. Looking at it now, both of these creatures are historically associated with evil. They were both associated with death and utilized as an explanation for unexplained death or illness.

Isabella:

Those are some solid points, Carolyn. Taking a look at modern day vampires and witches, both of them are portrayed in a way to make them seem less invincible. They’re both presented with struggles and conflicts that make them seem almost human. It’s kind of like these creatures evolved together in a way since both of their images changed together as time progressed.

Q:

So maybe vampires and witches aren’t so different than what we initially believed. They’ve shifted from monsters to adored characters. They’ve changed from something that was once ward off and feared to something welcomed and enjoyed.

Erika:

They even generate massive cult followings today because they are so beloved now.

Isabella:

It's so crazy how things change!

Carolyn:

And it really is, but as time progresses, change is inevitable. Have your opinions changed on vampires and witches now? Are they more similar or different in your eyes now? And how might you explain the character change of vampires and witches from the past to the present? We'll let you sit on these question and really think. That's all the time we have today. We hope you had fun listening to us discuss the topic of vampires and witches and hope you might have learned something new. Thanks for listening!

Isabella:

BYE!

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